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SUBJECT: Goma situation report for December 22, 2007

REF: Kinshasa 1391

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Note: The following report was provided by Embassy Kinshasa's political officer in Goma. End note.

1. (SBU) Summary: The North Kivu military situation remained stable during the previous week. However, FARDC continues to move reinforcements into and around the province. Pro-Nkunda and Pareco militia forces clashed again in a remote area of Masisi territory. Inhabitants of Rutshuru town protested against perceived MONUC brakes on FARDC military action and against continued IDP occupation of its principal school. FARDC has taken no action against commanders in the aftermath of the failed Masisi offensive, perhaps in fear of defection. Despite unprecedented military buildup during the last months, it has been unable to provide weapons to soldiers of the new 16th Integrated Brigade. FARDC chief of staff Kayembe has submitted his report on the offensive, but Kabila told North Kivu officials he was strongly opposed to punishing any of those involved. Belgian military sources (pls protect) allege FARDC soldiers were intentionally mutilated by pro-Nkunda troops after being taken prisoner during the fighting. Neither the press nor the GDRC has mentioned these allegations, which we are investigating. End summary.

Military situation stable  
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2. (SBU) The military situation in North Kivu remained stable through the end of last week. "No major clashes, nothing to worry about," MONUC North Kivu Brigade Commander General Indrajeet Narayan told us December 22 during his briefing on recent developments. FARDC continues to shift reinforcements into and around the province. Narayan said that the 8th Integrated Brigade (IB) was reported moving north from South Kivu, along with equipment and supplies. Both the 9th IB and two battalions of the 7th IB were on the move to Nyanzale, formerly held by the discredited 15th IB, from positions further south in Rutshuru territory.

3. (SBU) In Masisi territory, pro-Nkunda forces and fighters of the Hutu Pareco Mai-Mai militia again clashed, this time at Kuobo, north of the site of the MONUC helicopter crash earlier in the week (reftel). Narayan also cited reports of Nkunda troops on the move toward Kibati on the road to Kitchange. He said MONUC had transported 81st Brigade commander Colonel Philemon Yav and 15 others back to Masisi via helicopter.

4. (SBU) In Rutshuru territory, Narayan said MONUC had also provided transport for visits to Nyanzale and Rutshuru towns by a group of senior FARDC officers, including 8th Military Region Commander General Vainqueur Mayala and FARDC operations chief General Amuli Bahigwa. (Note: Amuli, a former MLC commander,

served as naval forces chief of staff during the transition. End note.) He noted some infiltration of Nkunda loyalists at Lalingara on the road to Tongo off the Goma-Rutshuru road.

15. (SBU) Narayn reported two protests in Rutshuru town. In the first, about a thousand civilians demonstrated against MONUC for supposedly preventing FARDC action in the eastern border enclave controlled by pro-Nkunda forces under Colonel Sultani Makenga. In fact, said Narayan, the North Kivu Brigade had attempted to safeguard 6th IB commander Colonel Antonio by convincing him to return to Rutshuru after he personally led -- without orders -- a small patrol of 30 soldiers into the enclave and ended up in a firefight at Tanuganya near Bunagana. In the second incident, students temporarily blocked the main road outside the offices of Territorial Administrator Dominique Bofondo as protested against the takeover by IDPs of the town's principal school as living quarters.

State of the FARDC  
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16. (SBU) Narayan again expressed concern about the state of the FARDC, which he characterized as "increasingly weak." Narayan said no commanders had been sacked. Yav and deputy regional military commander Colonel Delphin Kahimbi, both under suspicion for their actions in the Masisi offensive, were active once again. He said FARDC leadership is afraid sacked officers could defect to Nkunda. He cited conflicting reports that 14th IB commander David Ruguyi was either under arrest or had defected with 700 troops.

17. (SBU) Narayan said MONUC was providing training to two battalions of the new 16th IB. However, FARDC had sent all 1,500 men from brassage centers without giving them weapons; 750 fighters from the Jackson Mai-Mai militia also had no uniforms. He said MONUC

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trainers had only 30 borrowed weapons to train all 1500.

18. (SBU) Clovis Muni, an adviser to Governor Julien Paluku who is in regular contact with the Nkunda camp, told us later in the day that 100 14th IB troops had in fact defected. However, he said President Kabila told him and other North Kivu officials during meetings last week in Kinshasa that he was adamantly opposed to the group's calls to punish Defense Minister Chihez Diemu or senior military officers for the failure of the Masisi offensive. Muni said Kabila told them he would always regret having ordered the execution for treason of a group of officers during the civil war who turned out to be blameless, and would not repeat that mistake now.

19. (SBU) A North Kivu official of the national intelligence service ANR ("Agence Nationale de Renseignements") told us December 22 that FARDC chief of staff General Dieudonne Kayembe had forwarded his report on the offensive to Kabila, and singled out, among others, land forces chief General Gabriel Amisi, Yav and Kahimbi. He said that officers cited in the report would be called to Kinshasa to provide their own declarations in response to the accusations.

110. (SBU) Belgian Consul General Hugues Chantry (pls protect), visiting Goma from his post in Bukavu, cited first-hand reports by Belgian military officers that a number of FARDC soldiers had been seriously wounded and were being treated out of public view at a military camp in Kinshasa. The officers claimed that some had been intentionally mutilated by pro-Nkunda troops after being taken prisoner, to spread terror in FARDC ranks -- a war crime. Chantry said Kabila and Chihez are aware of the situation and extremely concerned about public reaction if information were to leak. The press has apparently not picked up on these reports. We will continue to monitor.

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